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ABSTRACT

An approach to promote student editing of their own compositions, to be used in intermediate English as a second language classes, is discussed. Although editing or monitoring may not improve the communicative accuracy of a written message, it may give the message a more native-like quality. Monitoring works best on morphemes which are acquired late but which are easy to conceptualize, such as the third person singular "s" on simple present tense verbs. Learning language rules is distinct from learning the language itself; the rules do not always have to be presented before acquisition. Krashen (1978) has described the monitor under-user, who appears to be uninfluenced by most error correction, and the monitor over-user, who relies strongly on conscious linguistic knowledge. It is suggested that before teachers can expect students to apply a rule to their writing, they must ascertain that the students know how to apply it correctly in a discrete-point task. Then, it is necessary to bring the rule out into the students' consciousness (and, perhaps, convince them of the importance of applying the rule to their own writing). The teacher can elicit the rule by asking the student to state the rule and write it down for future reference, and by stating the rule directly. Editing of compositions by students at the end of a writing session may make the actual writing process easier for the student. The editing time could be divided into two sessions, the first for improving communicative accuracy and the second for improving grammatical accuracy. This approach is an applied version of Krashen's Monitor Model. (SW)

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Applying the Monitor Model to the Editing of Compositions

Susan J. Dicker

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A class of intermediate ESL writing students is instructed to write a composition. They have an hour or so in which to accomplish this task. The topic of the composition may be unknown to them, or they may have had time previously to think about it. In any case, at the end of the class period, the teacher hopes to collect papers which are not only understandable and cohesive, but which have a minimal number of grammatical and structural errors.

This is not an untypical classroom situation, but one in which the teacher's expectations may be unrealistic and frustrating to teacher and students alike. Knowing that this task may lead to a plethora of errors, the teacher may take the recourse of providing the students with an editing period at the end of the session. S/he stops the students ten minutes before the end of the session and instructs them not to write any more, but to "go over" what they have written. The teacher may assume that the students, having been exposed to certain rules of the language for some time, and having applied these rules successfully in previous language tasks, will be able to find the errors related to these rules in their own writing. The teacher may expect the students' papers to improve during the editing period: in reality, few errors will actually be corrected.

The question which arises, then, is: What is it that prevents students from using language rules to edit their own

writing, even though they have been exposed to these rules and have demonstrated the ability to apply them in other language tasks?

Stephen Krashen (1978) has addressed this question in his formulation of the Monitor Model. Krashen explains that language rules are internalized in two ways: implicitly, without overt correction or interference, and explicitly, through the presentation of rules and error correction. He calls the first method of internalization "acquisition" and the second "learning". Learning is only available to the learner through the process of "monitoring", modifying acquired output (language produced by the learner without interference) by applying language rules to it.

In order to monitor, the learner must, of course, know the rule. Krashen first claimed that the only other condition necessary was time. It was pointed out to him by Heidi Dulay and Marina Burt that a learner may have time to monitor but still not do so, because he is involved with the meaning of his communication. Thus, another condition was added: the learner must be focused on the form of his communication.

The distinction between acquired knowledge and learned knowledge is supported by research in the order of morpheme acquisition. Studies have found uniform orders of morpheme acquisition for members of particular language-learning groups.

Roger Brown (1973) found this order among children learning English as a first language. Dulay and Burt (1973, 1974) found a morpheme acquisition order for children learning a second language. Bailey, Madden and Krashen (1974) found evidence of a uniform order of acquisition among adult second-language learners. These acquistion orders reflect the learners' acquired language, without interference from the monitor, and are referred to as "natural" orders of morpheme acquisition.

Under certain conditions, a "natural" order can be disturbed, as was shown in a study by Houck, Robertson and Krashen (1978a). Students were asked to describe various pictures; their comments were taped and the students transcribed the tapes themselves. They were then given a special form on which to correct their transcriptions. Most of the corrections made were aimed at improving the intelligibility rather than the form of the writing. Both the transcribing task and the correcting task showed a natural order of grammatical morphemes. The researchers then administered Larsen-Freeman's "writing task" (1975) to the same students. In this task, students are told to complete sentences such as Last year he (work) _____ in a factory. As in Larsen-Freeman's original study, an unnatural order of morphemes resulted. Krashen hypothesized that the disturbance in the orders was caused by the distinct natures

of the given tasks. Larsen-Freeman's task is a discrete-point test, asking the subject only to inflect the verb. The specificity of the task made it easy for the subjects to call forth and use conscious grammar rules. In contrast , the writing and self-correcting tasks were integrative tests; the students were not focused on one specific rule, but had to call forth a large part of their accumulated knowledge to accomplish the given tasks. One can imagine that a great deal of knowledge is needed in order to write and correct one sentence alone.

If we are concerned with how to bring out the monitor in student writing, we must explain what benefits can be derived from doing so. Although monitoring may not improve the communicative accuracy of a written message, it may give the message a more native-like quality. For example, errors in verb tense endings or punctuation do not greatly hinder comprehension of a written passage, but they do mark the writer as someone of limited English ability. By disturbing the natural order of morpheme acquisition, monitoring brings more grammatical accuracy into the writing. It works best on morphemes which are acquired late but which are easy to conceptualize, such as the third person singular s on simple present tense verbs. While learning language rules is distinct from learning the language itself, those rules are comforting to many students who like to

know "about" the language, and who find security in having a store of language concepts at their disposal. Finally, language rules don't always have to be presented before acquisition. A rule may be presented after a concept has been internalized, giving students a feeling of confidence in what they have already acquired. This may be especially helpful for the student who has too little faith in his acquired system, as described below.

Monitor use varies according to the individual language learner. Using interviews with learners concerning their use of conscious grammar, Krashen (1978b) describes a continuum of monitor users. At one extreme is the monitor under-user, who appears to be uninfluenced by most error correction. This learner may pay lip service to language rules, but is indifferent about using them. When he does correct himself, it is usually based on his intuitive feelings about what sounds or looks right. This reflects a self-confidence in his acquired system which may be over-rated. His speech, while not error-free, may be quite fluid and easy-going. Parallel to the self-confidence and fluidity of his language, the under-user is probably an outgoing and uninhibited person. At the other end of the continuum is the monitor over-user. Because he lacks faith in his own acquired system, the over-user relies strongly

on conscious linguistic knowledge. His speech is choppy and slow; he stops often to remember rules before daring to say anything. His written language, when produced under circumstances which encourage monitor use, may be quite accurate. A learner's over-use of the monitor may be due to an extreme sensitivity to other people's judgment of him. Insecure about himself as well as his language ability, the over-user may have an inhibited, introverted personality. The optimal monitor user is found mid-way between these two extremes. This language learner uses the monitor when it doesn't interfere with communication; his performance is, therefore, variable. He admits that his speech and writing are often careless. However, under the proper circumstances, this learner can and does improve his output. His writing, in particular, may closely approach native accuracy.

Monitor use also varies according to the kind of language task asked of the learner and the mode of language used. We have already seen that discrete-point tasks are more conducive to monitor use than integrative tasks. The familiarity of the learner with the topic, the amount of information offered to the learner before he is asked to produce any language, the person to whom he must convey his message, and the time he has to prepare it all affect the availability of the monitor. If we imagine task types on a continuum, with purely discrete-point tasks at one end and purely integrative tasks at the other,

real-life situations are obviously on the integrative end; classroom situations tend toward the discrete-point end. The mode of language used in the task may affect the timing of the monitor. In an oral task, the tendency would probably be for the learner to monitor before he produces his message. Once he says what he has to say, the message immediately vanishes; it is difficult to retrieve it in order to correct it, unless one has a very good aural memory. The written mode is more conducive to monitor use after production; teachers usually encourage students to make changes in their first drafts. However, the written mode allows the learner a wider range of choice as to when he can monitor. He may choose to do it before he writes anything, in the middle of a sentence, after each sentence, after he has completed his entire message, or in combinations of the above. The complexity of the task of writing an entire composition makes the choice of when and how to monitor a difficult one. It is here that the teacher needs to show the learner a viable monitoring strategy.

Several studies have demonstrated what students actually do when told to correct their papers. In Krashen, Butler, Birnbaum and Robertson (1978), two groups of students were given instructions to write a composition. One group was told to write as quickly as possible in a short period

of time. The other group was instructed to go over its work carefully. The researchers found little difference in the grammatical accuracy of the two groups. They interpreted the results as indicating that, even when editing, students are more concerned with what they are communicating than with the form of their communication. Although the students did edit, they did not use the editing time for the monitoring of conscious grammar. This conclusion is confirmed in the results of the previously-mentioned study by Houck, Robertson and Krashen. When students corrected the written transcripts of their oral comments, most of their corrections were attempts at improved intelligibility rather than improved form. These results suggest that the conditions for monitoring described by Krashen are not sufficient for a student to successfully monitor his written output. An examination and re-definition of these conditions are necessary.

Knowing a rule is of course necessary before one can be expected to use it. However, a student's knowledge of a rule is not an assurance of his ability or willingness to apply it to his own written work. Cohen and Robbins (1976) found that one student may know a rule but may be uncertain about how to use it; another may consciously select and use only the rules which he feels will help improve his writing. Duskova (1969) found that students may know a rule but may not yet be able to apply it automatically. Add to this the possibility that a

student knows a rule but doesn't remember it at the time he needs it. This suggests that before a teacher can expect a student to apply a rule to his own writing, s/he must first ascertain that the student knows how to apply it correctly in a discrete-point task. Then, it is necessary to bring the rule out into the student's consciousness (and, perhaps, convince him of the importance of applying the rule to his own writing). One way to bring the rule out is to elicit it from the student, asking him to state the rule and write it down so he can refer to it. Lawler and Selinker (1971) point out that most rules are presented to students in visual form, and that the visual memory of a rule may be of benefit to students during language performance. Another way of bringing out the rule may be for the teacher to state the rule directly. If some students already know the rule, this will merely confirm their knowledge and trigger their memories. If other students are unsure of the rule, the teacher's statement of the rule will assuage their doubts. A short example of how the rule is applied, given just before the students' editing period, will help students who are still insecure about how it works.

In the previously-mentioned studies by Krashen et. al., the condition of "focus on form" was satisfied by the instructions to the students to go over their work carefully or to corret their written work. We have seen that, while the re-

searchers expected the students to focus on the grammaticality of their work, the students did not interpret the instructions in this way, and chose to focus on the intelligibility of their work instead. This suggests that, if the teacher wants students to focus on the grammatical correctness of their writing, his/her instructions should make this clear. As Krashen states, increased specificity of a task yields increased use of the monitor. Focusing on one rule at a time during the editing session would break down the session to separate, specific tasks. If the teacher's concern with form seems to conflict with the students' concern with intelligibility, one resolution may be to divide the editing time into two sessions, the first for improving communicative accuracy and the second for improving grammatical accuracy. The first session would allow students to use dictionaries or other resources to check their choice and spelling of words. In order to assure a student that his composition has been understood, a reader (another student or the teacher) can be asked to re-state the gist of what the writer wanted to say. Once the student is assured that his work is understood, he will be able to focus on the grammatical form of his work.

Leaving the editing of grammaticality at the end of a writing session may make the actual writing process easier

for the student. Sondra Perl (1979) studied the composing process of unskilled college students by having them "think aloud" while they wrote compositions. By tape-recording the sessions, Perl was able to study the interaction of students' thinking and writing processes. She found that the students followed a rhythmic writing pattern, consisting of periods of planning, writing, re-reading and editing. This pattern was generally a beneficial one, in that re-reading and contemplating what had just been written helped the students decide what they would write next. However, when a student became overly concerned with the "correctness" of his writing, and concentrated his editing on changes in grammatical form, the development of his ideas was interrupted. A student such as this one might be able to improve the flow of his ideas if convinced to leave his concern for correct form for the end of the writing session.

A further way of making both the writing and editing sessions easier is the use of a preparation period before the actual composition writing. Although not the subject of this paper, pre-writing deserves mention because it affects so greatly a student's confidence in his ability to write. If a student can first find an idea interesting enough for him, gather details to back up his idea, and arm himself with a basic supply of words and expressions to use, his concern for expressing himself

clearly may be lightened, and the writing and editing processes may be easier for him.

The following diagrams summarize Krashen's Monitor Model and the ~~Revised~~ Applied Model suggested by this author. I have added the term "structural accuracy" to " grammatical accuracy". While grammar is limited to forms within a sentence, there are rules which govern language behavior at the sentence level and beyond. The form of a complete sentence, as opposed to a fragment or a run-on, is an example. These are rules which can be used for editing.

Krashen's Model: Knowledge of Rule + Time + Focus on Form →
Monitor Use

~~Revised~~ Applied Model for composition editing:

Time +

(1) Focus on communicative accuracy

(2) Focus on grammatical and structural accuracy

(a) selection of a rule which student has shown ability to apply to discrete-point tasks

(b) teacher's presentation of rule or elicitation of rule from student; presentation of example of rule application

(c) student's application of rule to composition

↓

Monitor Use

There are a great number of rules that have been generated to describe the English language. However, a rule which is too complex and weighty may be inappropriate for the purpose of editing. It would be valuable for a teacher to pick and choose a limited number of rules to use for the editing of a composition, depending on the particular goal(s) of the writing task. For example, a composition describing the daily activities of a writer's family member may have as its editing focus the use of the third person singular s, or the use of personal pronouns. A teacher may find that particular students consistently fail to apply certain rules. Each student might be told to make up his own editing checklist to remind him of the rules he needs to apply. It is necessary at times to overcome both the insecurity students have about their ability to improve their own writing, and the impression they have that a teacher's corrections on their papers will "cure" their errors. The editing strategies a student learns can help improve the accuracy of his written work before it is judged by a teacher or grader, and, at the same time, encourage a sense of self-confidence in the student's writing and correcting abilities. It must be remembered , however, that editing is not an automatic part of the writing process. It is a skill which, like any other language skill, must be specifically taught and reinforced.

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